

## State Commission

The Serve Illinois Commission has recently formed the Illinois Disaster Corps program. Through this program, AmeriCorps members from different programs across the state will be trained on the operation of a Volunteer Reception Center. The creation of this Corps comes from years of Illinois' response needs, and a partnership with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency. This year has seen significant movement in the creation of Illinois first statewide disaster response team and it will be using AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members.

## AmeriCorps State

One of the Illinois Justice Corps AmeriCorps members was staffing the courthouse law library when a distraught woman with visible injuries and a child came in, looking for help, with an Order of Protection for domestic violence. The Circuit Clerk told the woman where to find forms, but couldn't provide any other direction. Luckily, the Justice Corps member was able to step in. The member sat with the woman for about an hour and showed her how to complete the lengthy forms. Meanwhile, across the room, another member drew pictures on scrap paper with the child as a distraction while the mother described the abuse. After the forms were completed, the member walked with the woman and child to the Circuit Clerk's office to file the forms and was able to calm the woman while explaining what would happen next in the process. The member walked with her to the appropriate courtroom, and gave the woman the information for a domestic violence advocate and counselor. The Justice Corps member gave empathy and assistance to a woman and made an unbearable situation a little more manageable.

Francisco emigrated from Mexico in 1992. He lived in Chicago for 20 years and graduated from Noble Rauner College Prep in 2010, where he had been taught by many Teach For America AmeriCorps members and alumni. Francisco went on to study history at Wabash College, lead a number of campus groups, and graduate cum laude. After he graduated, Francisco joined Teach For America in Chicago and was hired to teach at Noble Hansberry College Prep – the same network where he attended high school. In year one at Hansberry, Francisco led his students to more than 1.5 years of academic growth. Now in his second year, Francisco teaches AP World History. He oversees an advisory group of 15 young men, helping them get on and stay on track to meet the school's promotion requirements, which include grades, community service, and other criteria. He is responsible for supporting these students in their college application process, and hopes that his support and teaching will create the opportunity for some of his students to do exactly what he did: excel in high school and college then come back to serve their local school community as Noble teachers.

## AmeriCorps National

Chicago's HIV prevalence rate is nearly three times the national average. To address HIV in their community, 11 full time AIDS United AmeriCorps members provide direct services to Chicago residents, including HIV testing and counseling, health care access, prevention outreach, prevention education, and emotional and social services to at-risk populations. Since 2000, AIDS United AmeriCorps members in Chicago have informed more than 20,000 people of their HIV status through HIV rapid testing and counseled them on their risk behaviors. The team has reached more than 35,000 people through community outreach and education, providing information about HIV/AIDS risk reduction and connecting people to medical care. Members have also mobilized more than 1,000 volunteers in the Chicago area.

Citizen Schools is a nonprofit organization that partners with middle schools to expand the learning day for children in low-income communities. Its AmeriCorps members serve in Chicago public schools, leading real-world learning projects, providing academic support, and helping all students discover and achieve their dreams. In their two years of service, AmeriCorps members serve as Teaching Fellows, giving students months of extra learning through academic mentoring and skill-building apprenticeships that translate into college readiness and career opportunities. Citizen Schools has been recognized as a leader in engaging volunteers, generating student impact, and balancing direct service with systemic change efforts. Students who are supported by Citizen Schools graduated from high school within four years at a rate of 71 percent, compared to 59 percent among matched peers, and 61 percent of Citizen Schools' alumni enroll in college.

City Year Chicago AmeriCorps has 206 members who serve full-time at 24 schools, helping more than 15,860 students at greatest risk of dropping out. City Year AmeriCorps members work alongside teachers, using research-based tools to improve students' attendance, behavior, and performance in math and English. The members also lead afterschool programs and school-wide initiatives to improve school culture. Thanks to the members' service, 52 percent of students who had individual support and began the year with a D or F in math or English improved their grades to C or higher, and 82 percent the teachers agree that having a City Year AmeriCorps member in their classroom allows them to reach more students and meet individual student learning needs.

The Chicago Urban League has four AmeriCorps members who serve through its Healthy Living Peer Educators Program. The AmeriCorps members reach out to participants, help them enroll in health insurance, and teach preventive health education workshops. The AmeriCorps members helped more than 400 underserved residents in the Chicago area. At one community event, AmeriCorps members partnered with the Chicago Urban League's weekly Workforce Development Department Success Strategies program to teach health education workshops for youth and young adults. For Black History Month, the members designed a rich, engaging, month-long health awareness series called Black Health for Black History. The members partner every week with the American Red Cross, local physicians' offices, health food grocers, and fitness and wellness organizations to offer interactive activities for members of the community.

New Sector AmeriCorps members in the AmeriCorps RISE program complete high-impact capacity-building projects for organizations in the Chicago area that focus on education and economic opportunity. Their service helps local nonprofits with projects ranging from volunteer engagement to performance measurement and beyond, and allows the nonprofits to create, improve, or expand services to their community. In the past year, 15 New Sector AmeriCorps members completed projects to strengthen organizations that serve more than 150 "opportunity youth" and 40,000 low-income residents. The AmeriCorps members participated in up to 200 hours of training, mentorship, and coaching to strengthen their service and help them continue to serve through careers in the social impact sector.

Up2Us Sports' Coach Across America program trained and placed 25 members in Chicago in the past year. The members coached and led sports-based programming. They used mentoring and youth development skills to help young people learn life skills and improve health through sports. They served 3,445 youth – mostly minority youth from low-income families – at 11 host sites. At the end of the program, 91 percent of the youth improved in one or more positive internal attribute that contributes to healthy decision-making, and 91 percent of the youth reported that their coach was a good role model. This program is effective because it uses sports to engage under-represented populations into AmeriCorps roles and inspire in them a longer-term commitment to service. After they complete their service, half of the AmeriCorps member coaches plan to pursue careers and/or higher education in recreation or health fields.

## AmeriCorps VISTA

In 2014, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago launched the Asian American Empowerment Project initiative. Fifteen AmeriCorps VISTA members served in thirteen Asian American organizations in the Chicagoland area to provide capacity to organizations facing detrimental budget cuts threatening service in immigrant and refugee communities. Through community outreach and volunteer recruitment, members recruited more than 400 volunteers who provided 8,200 hours of service, organized 53 and reached 7,690 new beneficiaries. Resource development members were able to raise \$25,805 across all organizations. Due to the project's unique structure of monthly cohort VISTA trainings and dedication to community involvement, three out of fifteen members decided to extend their service for an additional year, three continue to volunteer at their former organizations, and two VISTA alums are now full-time employees at the organizations they served during their AmeriCorps VISTA year.

The AmeriCorps VISTA program at the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs has VISTA members working on projects in rural communities, resulting in appreciable impacts in rural poverty alleviation across the state. Members helped establish a food co-op to improve access to healthy food for low income families in the region. As of August 2015, the co-op had 334 shares (ownerships) sold out of a goal of 500. The cooperative has 277 members and vendors who offer their local produce, meat and goods at the co-op. Several of the vendors are low-income families in the area that produce items in their gardens or on local farms. Larger vendors employ low income workers. The co-op offers lessons on nutrition and healthy habits to an average of 60 low income children in a local afterschool program. The efforts of the members who served in the last three years resulted in the creation of one full-time and one part-time job at the co-op.

## AmeriCorps NCCC

In service with the Forest Preserve of Cook County, an AmeriCorps NCCC team helped restore an urban forest preserve by removing invasive species in order to allow native plants to thrive. As part of its centennial initiative, the Forest Preserve has recommitted to improving the health of this land and to ensure the preserve's appearance is welcoming to visitors. The team mulched 30 acres of trees, walking trails, and educational flower and plant gardens. The team also removed 200 ash trees that were affected by the Emerald Ash Borer beetle and cleared 10 acres of land consisting of dead trees and giant branches, and removed bucked logs and limbs. Members removed about 2,000 pounds of Garlic Mustard, Burdock, Buckthorn, Honeysuckle and Burberry plants. The team's effort contributed to the restoration of the forest preserves, reestablished native plants and animals that once belonged to the area, and provided safer recreational areas for the visitors of the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

An AmeriCorps NCCC team assisted Living Lands and Water (LLW) with an Alternative Spring Break river cleanup program, planting trees and leading volunteers through the Million Tree Project. The program hosts community-based river cleanups where volunteers collect debris from shorelines and islands via work boats and barges. The project started in Memphis, TN where members helped clean up the Mississippi River during the program's event. Members collected 3,061 lbs of trash. When the team was finished helping with the event they traveled to East Moline to help with the project. The project consisted of wrapping, delivering, and handing out trees. The trees were Swamp White Oak, White Oak, Bur Oak, Red Oak, and Black Oak. During the time spent in East Moline, the team wrapped a total of 125,000 trees. Afterward, the team traveled to Peoria to hand out 8,500 trees on Earth Day. Due to the work of the team, the Mississippi River (which many communities depend on) was protected, while the tree canopy increased in multiple towns and cities.

## Social Innovation Fund

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) transforms lives by using evidence to find what works and make it work for more people. The SIF Classic and SIF Pay for Success programs harness the expertise of grant-making intermediaries to identify, evaluate and expand effective nonprofits serving low-income communities across America. AIDS Foundation of Chicago's Connect2Care Program has maintained more than 90 percent linkage to care rate for clients enrolled since 2010. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation SIF programs are putting residents back to work, and in 2015 they helped place more than 600 people in jobs. The Social Innovation Fund is investing \$189,194 and expanding the impact of 13 nonprofits.